

## KUMHO TIRE: A HEALTH EMERGENCY IN MACON

Kumho Tire opened their \$450 million Macon facility in 2016 **on county-owned property and with significant public funding**. Since then, the company has had an alarming history of health and safety violations, low wages and worker harassment. As a result, workers voted to join the United Steelworkers union in September 2019. Since then, the company has tried everything they can to delay recognizing the union and avoid bargaining with workers.

### Kumho's Failed COVID-19 Response Puts Workers and Our Community at Risk

Hourly workers at Kumho report that the company has consistently failed to implement the most basic safety precautions since the beginning of the pandemic. **Now, a COVID-19 outbreak in the facility includes a rash of positive cases that has the potential to expand beyond the plant.**

On July 10-11, the company claimed it would shut down the entire facility for sanitizing, but then forced two departments to stay on rather than clear everyone out for the appropriate cleaning.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, workers have reported that:

- Hand sanitizer containers were empty
- Soap containers have been empty
- Sanitizing products made available lacked labels to describe what they were and, in some cases, led to skin irritation
- There was inconsistent enforcement of physical distancing in the workplace, and in some cases distancing was not observed at all. Several departments required multiple employees work closely side-by-side.
- Shifts and schedules were not sufficiently staggered to limit the number of people on-site.
- Face masks were only available from a team lead, who would handle the mask before giving them out, making workers feel unsafe putting them on their face once they had been touched
- Initially, no temperature checks or screening at the gates
- The company is not offering any additional paid sick leave for workers impacted by COVID-19 after their initial expanded PTO pool was exhausted by the first shutdown
- Company statements to workers regarding FMLA, paid leave, unemployment and scheduling have been confusing, sparse and last minute

Reports have been made to federal, state and local agencies to request help for workers, but nothing has changed.

In May, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) wrote a letter to the company that resulted in posting a Notification of Alleged Hazards. Kumho was supposed to fix several issues, but according to worker reports, many were not resolved.

On July 20, several workers attended the Macon-Bibb Board of Health public meeting to express concerns about the unsafe conditions in the facility that they are afraid could put them, their families and their communities at risk. The Board expressed concern for factory workers and intends to raise the issue with the County Commission.



## Union Bargaining for Worker Protections

**As soon as the crisis became clear, the USW reached out to Kumho management to request information and meetings about COVID-19 protocols. Unfortunately, the company refused to respond.**

In letters submitted to Kumho on March 20 and April 15 the union sought to meet with management to discuss protective polices similar to those the union achieved at other Middle Georgia facilities including BASF, Graphic Packaging and Armstrong.

These agreements include paid-leave policies for individuals infected, exposed or caring for someone infected, safety precautions like screening at entrances, availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and adjustments to work flows and schedules to allow for physical distancing. None of these facilities have had outbreaks as bad as Kumho.

## Kumho was Already a Severe Violator of Health and Safety Laws

**Prior to the current health crisis, in May 2019 OSHA designated Kumho a “Severe Violator” for their indifference to the health and safety of employees. They are the only tire manufacturer on the list of some of the most dangerous places to work in America.**

In the last five years, Kumho has been cited for over 40 violations and fined \$486,562. Violations include exposing employees to fall, struck-by and burn hazards, failing to following hazardous energy control procedures, failing to train employees properly and failing to provide appropriate machine guarding.

Just recently in May 2020, there was a serious accident involving a supervisor who tipped a forklift, running it into an hourly worker who suffered serious injuries. Workers report that the same, untrained supervisor has been involved in forklift incidents before. The company had already been issued violations for failing to ensure powered industrial truck operators are competent to operate safely. They were supposed to remedy this by June 19, 2019.

## Workers Voices Need to be Heard

It is imperative that all county officials come together to keep us safe in this public health crisis.

**We are requesting that County Commissioners and members of the Board of Health meet with workers and the United Steelworkers to hear their stories and discuss ways the county can help protect the health of workers and the community during this emergency.**

